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FOR INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTEE ON UNICEF
STATEMENT TO THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD

1. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. As non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we see a greater recognition by the world at large of the crucial human resources we bring to the international landscape. We are a part of the responsive citizenry who work to involve the world's peoples in the mission of UNICEF.

2. But our NGO Committee on UNICEF represents just a token of the tremendous life-force that NGOs bring to the goals and programmes supported by UNICEF at national and regional levels. That far-reaching participation of national NGOs is a story still to be told.

3. The activities of the NGO Committee on UNICEF continue to be guided by the two benchmark documents for children - the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit Plan of Action.

4. We heard the Executive Director's call for universal ratification of the Convention by the year 1995 and can only add our wholehearted support.

5. As ratifications continue to come in, we are turning our attention to implementation. We feel strongly that the entire United Nations system should support countries in their efforts to provide for children the conditions described in the Convention's articles. The NGO Committee on UNICEF, therefore, co-sponsored with UNICEF and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights a consultation on "The Role of the United Nations and NGOs in the Implementation of the Convention" in late March 1993.

6. The consultation was attended by representatives of 11 United Nations agencies and 37 international NGOs. The outcome was a statement of recommendations for action by NGOs, Governments, donors, the United Nations system and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Since the consultation was

a satellite meeting of the World Conference on Human Rights, its recommendations will be submitted to the Conference in Vienna, Austria, in June 1993. Copies of the statements are available on the table at the back of the room.

7. NGOs are concerned, as are many of you, about modern warfare strategies that kill and maim civilians, including children, in greater proportions than soldiers. Who can forget the media images we have seen of children in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and southern Sudan?

8. The fact is that many combatants and civilians are not aware of the protections for children written into international law. An NGO Working Group wrote and began distribution of a "Summary of international treaties to protect children in armed conflict". We would appreciate your taking one of the copies available on the table at the back of this room. You can explore with your Governments ways in which these treaties can be publicized and enforced.

9. The NGO Committee on UNICEF will hold its third meeting of Chief Executive Officers of major humanitarian and development organizations in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 1994 on the contribution of youth to lasting peace. The prevention of violence in the resolution of conflicts is one of the priority goals of many NGOs, and youth have an important role to play.

10. Following up on the World Summit for Children, NGOs in many countries have been active in helping to develop and implement national programmes of action (NPAs). Those developed by African Governments were discussed at the December 1992 International Conference on Assistance to African Children held in Dakar, Senegal. NGOs were very pleased to be able to attend as full participants, and reconfirmed their commitment to working with Governments on NPAs. One of the outcomes has been a renewed focus on Africa by a number of major NGOs. The NGO Committee on UNICEF likewise welcomed the commitment by donors to increasing the percentage of official development assistance which is allocated to social development. We hope that donors will act urgently on this commitment, which is of such importance to the children of Africa.

11. At two other major conferences last year - the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the International Conference on Nutrition - NGOs worked hard with UNICEF staff to ensure attention to children's needs and the inclusion of quantifiable goals. We very much want these goals to be reflected in your NPAs.

12. We are very pleased to see the strong action that some of you have taken to advance the education of girls and women, which we now know is a key factor in the social and economic development of a nation. This year, to follow up on last year's two successful conferences on the topic, the NGO Committee on UNICEF has formed a task force to collect information about programmes that actually increase girls' access to education. Through the joint United Nations/NGO Education for All Network created after the Jomtien Conference, this information will be used to mobilize NGOs to invest more of their resources in the reduction of gender disparity.

13. The NGO Committee on UNICEF has focused on two regions this year in its efforts to strengthen national NGOs. The first region is Eastern and Central Europe, where the NGO Committee on UNICEF held a consultation with national

counterparts just over one month ago. NGOs in Eastern and Central Europe are emerging in considerable numbers, and proving to be effective and innovative actors in the field of child protection, family life, welfare and development in the region. The report on the consultation will be available in July 1993.

14. The second region is in Central America, where, during this International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples, plans are being made by the NGO Committee on UNICEF to hold a regional conference on the Convention in November 1993.

15. We very much value UNICEF support for the work of NGOs. We are particularly pleased with the increased level of collaboration in information and advocacy programmes that has resulted from the strengthening of the secretariat in New York and at Geneva. As NGOs, we will continue to function in ways that promote the mission and vision of UNICEF in the world. I believe we all realize, as Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said, "we must seize the moment for the sake of the future".

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STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD ON REACHING THE POOREST AND OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TOGETHER

A. A World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty

1. On 17 October 1987, Father Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, brought 100,000 people together on the Plaza of Human Rights in Paris when he unveiled a commemorative stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty, violence and ignorance. The words engraved on the stone recall one of the greatest challenges facing the international community:

> "Wherever men and women are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated. It is our solemn duty to come together to ensure that these rights are respected."

2. Every 17 October, thousands of people of all backgrounds and from all countries gather around the very poor. 17 October has become a special day to observe silence in honour of the victims of misery, to listen to them and to renew, individually and together, our commitment to overcome extreme poverty.

3. The proclamation by the United Nations in December 1992 that established 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty continues the history started in 1987 and places the poorest at the heart of the international community.

B. A call to overcome the worst aspects of poverty

4. In its 1993 State of the World's Children report, UNICEF launches an appeal to overcome the worst aspects of poverty, the ones that hurt and crush the dignity, the integrity and the life of the poorest people. This appeal is

courageous and necessary and it indicates that UNICEF continues to be, within the United Nations system, a faithful defender of the poorest children and of their families.

5. UNICEF continues to give much attention to the objective of reaching the poorest. The report of the Executive Director devotes many paragraphs to this issue. Also, the UNICEF Evaluation Office is working with the International Movement ATD Fourth World and some members of its Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World on a study that aims to identify and analyse the conditions necessary if the poorest are to participate in development programmes.

C. Refusing to accept extreme poverty, overcoming the worst aspects of poverty and reaching the poorest: allied objectives

6. The International Movement ATD Fourth World considers these three objectives to be inextricably linked: (a) refusing to accept extreme poverty; (b) overcoming the worst aspects of poverty; and (c) reaching the poorest people. These objectives can be attained only when they are pursued together and simultaneously.

7. For example, the availability of some resources and means is necessary to eradicate poverty but the objective will not be reached without the personal commitment of men and women, and without the firm commitment of countries and institutions that will be ready to make common cause with the poorest, as UNICEF has said, and that will be ready to walk on the necessary road to establish a real solidarity with the most deprived inhabitants of our nations. Eradicating extreme poverty will only be possible if all persons, at their own level, in their own milieu and in their own areas of responsibility choose to ally themselves with the poorest people.

8. To overcome the worst aspects of poverty, we must reach the poorest people because it is the poorest children and their families who suffer the most from malnutrition, illness, illiteracy and natural and man-made catastrophes. There is general agreement on this point.

9. The poorest are not passive victims. They actively resist injustices and struggle against their poverty. In this field of extreme poverty, they are the primary experts, having an understanding and practical knowledge that no one else has.

10. To overcome the worst aspects of extreme poverty, we must make sure that services and programmes reach the poorest people and also give ourselves the means to learn about their experiences, efforts and successes and about the obstacles they face. Without this strong will to reach the poorest and learn from them, extreme poverty will persist because whole areas of knowledge will be missing. We might improve the living conditions of a large number of people but we will not have reached the poorest of the poor and, therefore, not have established a minimum level of security for all.

11. The International Movement ATD Fourth World believes that the objective of reaching the poorest becomes central at a time when the international community,

with UNICEF as the leader, is launching a call to overcome the worst aspects of poverty and to go beyond "loud" and "silent" emergencies. Major steps forward will be possible in this fight against extreme poverty if this objective is pursued.

12. The Executive Board should reaffirm the importance of this objective of reaching the poorest and continue to be one of its faithful defenders within the United Nations system. The Executive Board and its members might also wish to support existing efforts to improve our knowledge of the conditions necessary if this objective is to be attained.